

Perren and Edmund Petrig, and that the climbing world mourned with them the loss of Otto Furrer with whom so many members of our Club had climbed or skied and who was so greatly admired and loved by all. I told them that we in America hoped that more of them would find their way to our side of the water where they would be warmly welcomed, and where they would find new peaks to conquer.*

CHRISTINE L. ORCUTT

ASIA

Sikkim Himalaya, 1952. For one continuous year I had been tied to a desk in the teeming, sweltering city of Calcutta and it seemed time for a change. The Sikkim Himalaya, only a few hours away by plane, offered excellent mountaineering possibilities within the four-week period that I would be able to have off during October.

After three months devoted to organization and to obtaining the necessary permissions, three of us left Gangtok with about 20 porters on October 3rd. Our party was comprised of Mrs. Monica Jackson (British), Roger Vaughan (Australian), and myself, and among our porters we had five Sherpas with previous high-altitude experience, Lhakpa Tsering, Lhakpa Gyelbo, Gyalzen, Nima Tensing and Pemba Norbu. The first three had been above 23,000 feet with recent French and British expeditions in Nepal. Accompanying us for the first week of our journey was Trevor Braham, secretary of the Himalayan Club, accompanied by six Sherpas under the leadership of the well-known Ang Tharkay. Trevor's party left us at Lachen to cross the Sebu La and make an attempt on Chombu (21,000 ft.) in north central Sikkim.

At the start we were harassed by a series of minor crises. One of these was almost major. The permission which had been granted us to enter northeast Sikkim was cancelled shortly before our departure. This ended our plans to make an ascent of Pauhunri (23,385 ft.). The latter would have been relatively easy since it lies

* In the library of the Club house, framed and hanging on the wall, are the signatures of the guides who attended the Führer Fest in Zermatt, on 28 September, 1952.

climatically and physiographically on the Tibetan plateau where the weather is clear and the slopes more gentle than in the Matterhorn-like topography to the south. However, Pauhunri lies exactly on the Sikkim-Tibet border, and probably for this reason our plans aroused the fears of the authorities. In desperation we applied for an alternative and were granted permission to go up the Tista Valley as far as Lachen and there turn left to enter the Zemu Valley. This locality is renowned for its large glaciers, heavy snowfall, and bad weather; we were therefore skeptical at the start. However, the country includes seven great peaks of the Himalaya: Kanchenjunga, Simvu, Siniolchu, The Twins, Nepal Peak, Tent Peak, and the Sugarloaf, all ranging in height from 21,000 to 28,150 feet. Furthermore, the region has historical interest for a mountaineer; from the Zemu, the Bavarian expeditions of the thirties had made their ascents of the Sugarloaf, the North Peak of Simvu, Siniolchu, Nepal Peak, and the renowned attempts on Kanchenjunga via the Northeast Spur. In October 1952 on the Zemu the only remaining records of their efforts were a few rusted cans at old campsites and the large cross and cairn, at the foot of Kanchenjunga's east face, which marks the grave of Hermann Schaller.

In eight strenuous days, some of them in 90 degree tropical heat, we climbed with heavy loads from 2000 feet in the jungle to 16,000 feet on the Green Lake plain. At one of the dak bungalows in the Tista gorge we were at 4500 feet and had an excellent view 30 miles away of the whole of Kanchenjunga, framed in clouds above the gorge of the Talung Chu. It was at this stop that we signed the bungalow register and, on turning back the pages, found that the names went back to 1912. On the pages for 1922 and 1924 were the signatures of George Leigh-Mallory and members of the Everest expeditions; further on were those of Paul Bauer, Uli Weiland, Adi Gottner, Gunther Hepp, and others of the German Kanchenjunga team, most of whom were to die on Nanga Parbat in the tragedy of 1937. The same Sikkim that had greeted them greeted us now. Not a particle of change had touched this land in 30 years.

We set up our base camp on October 11th at 15,700 ft. amid the grass, gentians, and edelweiss of the Green Lake plain beside the Zemu glacier. Thanks to the generous assistance of the

Himalayan Club, in particular Mrs. J. Henderson of Darjeeling, we had been well-provided with porters and equipment for a prolonged stay above snowline.

On the morning of October 12th we set out with the intention of visiting the Nepal Gap (20,000 ft.), lowest point in the ridge which runs north from Kanchenjunga to the Tibet Border. However, we changed our plans at mid-day and decided to attempt a 20,100-foot unclimbed and unnamed peak which overlooks the Hidden Glacier and the pass leading from the Zemu region into Lhonak. All day long the three of us, with five Sherpas, struggled up a scree and rock slope and eventually were able to find a place level enough for three tents, in a snow hollow at about 18,500 ft. Roger, whose leave time was running out, left us at this point to return to camp with two Sherpas. It was at this 18,500-foot camp that we had our only spell of altitude sickness. Lhakpa Tsering, Lhakpa Gyelbo, and I lost our lunch while setting up the tents, and both Monica and I were affected by sleeplessness. We had recovered by morning, however, and the five of us set off for the summit. It took about four hours, first across a glacier and small icefall, then a long snow climb culminating in a conical peak from which we had a magnificent view. Kanchenjunga loomed up behind us, only a few miles away. The mists were swirling at its base and its summit was capped by an ominous crescent-shaped cloud that gave us much worry throughout the day; ordinarily such clouds mean an approaching storm, but this one turned out to be a false alarm. To the west, the view of Everest was blocked by the great east wall of Tent Peak. To the southeast the crest of Siniolchu stood alone above the clouds. Freshfield had called it "probably the most beautiful mountain in the world." From our vantage point, its unbelievably steep ridges and fluted walls loaned weight to Freshfield's remark; as seen from the old German base below, its symmetry bears out the truth of his statement. To the north from our summit lay the arid Lhonak valley, flanked on the far side by a high range; all of the passes through this range are above 18,000 feet, and through one of them, the Chorten Nyima La, we could see the limitless expanse of the Central Asian plateau. To the northeast lay the great peaks of northeast Sikkim—Chomimo, Kanchenjau, and Pahunri, and to their right, hazed by the distance, rose the lone mass of Chomolhari in Tibet.

We wasted no time in descending, as the weather was threatening. Our 18,500-foot camp was packed up in a jiffy and that night we rested in the comfort of the base camp. It snowed all night, but the next morning was again clear.

We started out on October 15th with three porters for an attempt on the Sugarloaf. The altitude of this peak is given on the German map as 21,150 feet; by John Hunt in his 1937 account as 21,400 feet. It had been climbed once, by the Germans in 1931. Since then Hunt had made two unsuccessful attempts, and one small ill-equipped postwar party had completely disappeared on the mountain, leaving only one porter who returned.

It took us two days of tiresome boulder-hopping to reach an altitude of 18,000 feet, where we placed a camp. One of these days was spent reconnoitering to the base of the northeast spur of Kanchenjunga, in order to obtain a clear view of our route up the Sugarloaf. On this reconnaissance, as well as on our climb later, we were able to get some excellent views and photographs of the north col of Kanchenjunga, together with the approach to the Twins from the south. The latter did not appear difficult, and had we been able to spare more time, it would have been a good possibility for a first ascent (of the eastern Twin). As it is, this will have to wait for the next effort. A circuitous but possible route to Kanchenjunga would lie up from the Twins glacier to the south slope of the Twins, then down onto the North Col, and from there to the summit of Kanchenjunga. This would be the only possible way of reaching the North Col from the Sikkim side, as the slopes of the col itself are too steep to permit direct ascent, and on the left an ice cliff blocks the way at about 23,000 feet on Kanchenjunga itself. On the day after the reconnaissance, as we were proceeding under a moraine wall of dubious reliability, Monica questioned the Sherpas about the safety of the place. Lhakpa Gyelbo replied, "This place safe, mem-sahib; dangerous only if rocks fall." No rocks fell.

We were approaching the mountain from the south, via a glacier that would lead onto the west ridge at about 20,000 feet. At 18,000 feet the boulder slope up which we had come ended in a V, flanked on the left by the heavily-crevassed Sugarloaf glacier, on the right by the rock walls of a subsidiary peak. Where the V pinched out it was impossible to go further; rock cliff, ice cliff,

Top: SUGAR LOAF FROM GREEN LAKE PLAIN

Bottom: KANCHENJUNGA

The summit is about eight miles away

Photos, R. H. T. Dodson

and boulder slope all came together in a welter of icefall and overhangs. This had not been the case in the thirties, as shown by our German map. In fact, so much melting of glaciers had occurred that in places the snouts had retreated over a half mile and the location of crevassed areas was very difficult now compared to then.

We reconnoitered the pinch-out; we reconnoitered for 1000 feet up the rock cliff in an effort to get over it; we finally reconnoitered across the glacier itself, dodging crevasses all the way, and found a similar boulder slope on the far side. This also pinched out, but with the help of much step-chopping and a few ice pitons we managed to get over the 100-foot icefall and onto the smooth glacier slopes beyond. Our Camp was pitched at 19,500 feet that night, October 18th. The temperature fell to 8 degrees above zero and a wind piled the loose powder snow against our tents. On the 19th we had to make our bid for the summit as only two days of food supply and kerosene remained.

At 6:30 we were off. The steep slope leading from the glacier to the west ridge presented no technical difficulties but made slow going because of the thin air. We would go ten steps, then sink to our knees and pant from three to five minutes—another 10 steps, another 3 to 5 minutes, and so on. At last we gained the ridge. It was narrow and corniced. Soon, at about 20,500 feet, it ended abruptly against a 400-foot rock gendarme. At this point, Monica, who had done amazingly well for her first trip above 11,000 feet, decided that discretion was the better part of valor and turned back to camp with Lhakpa Gyelbo and Nima Tensing. Gyalzen and I continued on. It took us two hours to climb the gendarme. The rock was steep and rotten granite, but the sun was warm and the wind had died down. I led the way and Gyalzen followed without difficulty. The exposure was severe, but there were many good handholds despite the loose rock and we had enough pitons to ensure safety for the leader. Finally we emerged on top, where the snow ridge began again. Up we went, slowly picking our way along the corniced arête. Suddenly we reached a small dip in the ridge, followed by a 60-foot very steep pitch. It had a four-foot cornice on one side, a very steep 4000-foot icewall on the other. The 60-foot ridge itself was extremely steep. We threw a handful of stones at it, picked from a nearby rock jutting from the ridge. A thin layer of powder snow slid away, causing a snowslide down

THREE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE A.A.C., MOUNT COOK IN THE
BACKGROUND

A. P. Harper, G. W. Young, and N. E. Odell at The Hermitage, New Zealand,
February 1953

Photo, New Zealand Alpine Club

the northface. Gyalzen, who had been following eagerly until now, shook his head and said, "Too steep, sahib—*Avalanche!*" I took his advice, although it was difficult to give up in fine weather, with plenty of energy left in us, with the morning only half-gone, and with only an hour's climb remaining along the gentle snow ridge leading from our 60-foot pitch to the summit. At this point, about 21,000 feet, we turned back.

Our camp was packed up the same day and we moved down the mountain, camping that night just below the icefall. On the next day we wanted to make a one-day detour to visit Schaller's grave at the foot of Kanchenjunga's 10,000-foot east face, but our faithful porters looked downcast when we mentioned it. On quizzing them, we discovered that we had just consumed all our milk and sugar. "Mem-sahib," said Lhakpa Gyelbo to Monica, "when plenty food Sirpas always follow Sahibs—but no milk, no sugar, Sirpas no go anywhere." Grateful for the fine job that they had done, we were in no mood to insist, and so the five of us pushed on to the base camp.

On the 21st we spent our last day among the peaks, camped near the old German base. The moonlight played on the slopes of Siniolchu directly above us as the laughter of the Sherpas around the juniper fire filled the night air. With regret we left the snow to descend into the tropics.

R. H. T. DODSON

N. B. On October 26th our permission to remain in Sikkim north of Gangtok was cancelled, but as we were already beyond recall it did not affect our trip. We discovered later that this cancellation had been due to a directive issued from New Delhi, enforcing an old British 19th century law that draws an "inner-line" about 50 to 100 miles south of the Indo-Tibetan frontier, forbidding all foreigners to go north of the line. As far as I know, all peaks above 20,000 feet in India and Sikkim fall north of the inner line. It appears, therefore, that the only remaining chance for high climbing in the Himalaya is in Pakistan (Nanga Parbat and Karakoram) and Nepal, although the latter is beginning to tighten up also. I intend to apply for permission to enter Nepal in either 1954 or 1955, in order to approach the same Twins—Sugarloaf-

Kanchenjunga area from the Nepal side, now that Sikkim is sealed off, but have my doubts about whether the authorities will grant it.

R. H. T. D.

Mount Everest. In 1952 the Swiss made two strong attacks on the Nepalese side of Mount Everest, one before and the other after the monsoon.

Following the route discovered by Dr. Charles S. Houston and H. William Tilman in 1950, and unsuccessfully attempted by the British under Eric Shipton in 1951, the pre-monsoon party went in to the mountain through Namche Bazar and on April 23rd reached the foot of the Khombu Glacier, where they established their base camp at 16,500 feet. From there a medial moraine led them easily to the site of Camp 1 at 17,220 feet at the foot of the wildly broken up icefall which rises 2,500 feet to the floor of the West Cwm. To find a route up this first major obstacle was no easy task. It was there that the British had failed the year before. The first two reconnaissances, made by Dr. Gabriel Chevalley, René Dittert, René Aubert, and Raymond Lambert, ended in miserable failure among the yawning crevasses and tottering séracs. André Roch, Léon Flory, Ernest Hofstetter, and J-J. Asper decided to make a last desperate attempt on the left side of the icefall which was overhung by a 5,000-foot slope covered with hanging glaciers and scarred by avalanche troughs. At first, this route seemed too dangerous because of the avalanche threat, but it was the very debris of the avalanches which filled many of the cracks and allowed the party to advance. Finally a last crevasse barred the route completely, leaving no way around. After descending into the crack and climbing the precipitous far side, the climbers managed to rig a rope bridge. From then on they crossed by means of a Tryolean traverse.

The work of reconnoitering higher began immediately, while the Sherpas, under the direction of several Swiss, brought load after load up the icefall. The pack route was not easy, as it led past towers of precariously balanced ice, over huge, ever-changing crevasses which they crossed on tiny snow bridges, through avalanche debris, up precipitous icy slopes. Twice pack parties were nearly caught by avalanches. The Sherpas were, however, more than equal to the task. Camp 2 was placed on a comparatively flat